

[association of autonomous astronauts]

space:1999

8

★ ten days that shook the universe

JUNE 20th



Intergalactic Conference Report

Westminster University yesterday hosted the most exciting event of its academic year, the Third Intergalactic Conference of the Association of Autonomous Astronauts. The conference joined together AAA and non-AAA speakers, and, although the eight talks were demanding and the conference itself lasted the whole afternoon, we can say that the degree of attention from the public was impressive. The proof of this was the debate at the final symposium, when interesting and engaging questions were asked (certainly, as an Italian autonomous astronaut, I am used to silly comments about the AAA project).

The conference began at 11 am, with autonomous astronauts preparing the registration table, including a brief Who's Who of conference speakers and a collection of AAA propaganda, plus the new Space 1999 daily

report. At the beginning of the conference there were about 40 people in the room.

John Eden introduced and managed the whole event. The first talk was by Professor Chris Welch, who traced the history of the British Interplanetary Society since its foundation in 1933. Science fiction writers as well as young physicists were involved and, after having been considered nothing more than a bizarre organisation for over twenty years, they were revalued as visionaries at the beginning of the space race in the Sixties. After him, Paul MacAuley proposed his alternative historicisation of the conquest of the Solar System. Mark Sinker talked about the negative impression he had whilst meeting government-sponsored astronauts, and Neil Disconaut discussed the rise of free market space groups.

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Hostile Environments:

Extracts from the presentation by Dorothy Matrix for AAA 'Space 1999' conference, London, 19/6/99

The race into space is not merely between the scientific elite and those who wish to consider themselves autonomous. The dynamic that maintains the very structure of this society will insist that we will all spend time in space, either volutarily or involuntarily. (I mean, we don't want to see any more repeats of yesterday's events...)

Future Excavations Incorporated exist to project cultural, social and industrial models into deep future situations, to pinpoint problems, and to provide (if necessary) solutions. Our recent work has taken us into considering the outer atmospheres and the moons surface as feasible solutions to the impending crisis of social order.

Our methods of operation are designed to thwart both publicity and a wider understanding of our tasks and aims. We like to draw on specific expertise without the awareness of the participant, a strategy developed in computer programming projects such as weapon guidance systems whereby programmer expertise was syphoned into modular projects such that no individual had an idea of the project whole - eliminating both security and individual 'conscience crisis' risks.

For the purpose of this conference we are willing to give a little more away than is usual. It is common knowledge that the stability of capitalist economics is less about production and more about social control. The industrial infrastructure is moving elsewhere. For the new generation, Factory was just a record label. Contemporary trends have seen the nature of modern work move towards data administration and production of information. Each data processing unit produces information that meets with other information and eventually becomes data for another processing unit. The cycle goes on without end. The work environment is the office... it becomes a way of life. Commuting in, work, commuting home is a dead zone whereby any romantic sense of job satisfaction or relationship (alienated or otherwise) to a tangible product is non-existent.

Social control was maintained initially through the leisure system, and most recently through cultural consumption. As work becomes more meaningless then the importance of culture in providing a reason for existence increases. This means that culture has to re-invent itself, permanently. It has to provide new models that people can identify with. It has to constantly change and fracture. Our paper on cultural crisis theory written 4 years ago suggested that culture could not attain the required rate of diversification and renewal, that a problem for social control was on the horizon.

As we began to look for feasible solutions we drew on various key projects and documents. Howard Slater's research into psychological control systems and Kafka style immiseration within office life suggested that office life could not improved, that the burden of responsibility for life enhancement stopped short of the office door. This was the bottom line: either the nature of work had to be changed, or the office environment had to be re-located. The latter option has been chosen.. and to coin a phrase 'space is the place' - our experts believe that the cultural prestige gained from becoming an astronautical office worker will be enough to allay the pressures on cultural mechanisms. I mean, look at the interest in the AAA its very 'cutting edge' to want to get into space.

The first experiments involved the ill fated Mir space station. Hiding behind the well publicised crisis of outer space mechanical failure was the first stage of a global plan to re-animate the heart and soul of deadend office work. It was suggested that by creating offices in space (either orbiting offices or moon based offices) the impending global crisis could be resolved. What went wrong with the Mir experiment was that the astronauts were just that - trained astronauts. When sent into space with 'nothing to do' other than maintain a few database systems; boredom, paranoia and panic eventually set in. Subsequently the astronauts felt obliged to double-check and tinker with the scientific structure of the space-station, resulting in malfunction and near tragedy. If the

astronauts had been experienced office workers, then none of this would have happened - they would have simply passed the hours playing Microsoft Solitaire games, wasting time on the web, or trying to outdo each other with the fanciest screensaver.

We decided the time had come to test drive office workers in space. Of course, we all know that its impossible to send ordinary people into space (that is why the bulk of you are here today), so the thrust of our project was to simulate space conditions and bring in the test subjects. In essence, monitoring the psychological effects of performing routine office work in space. For this we needed our 'hostile environment' - a place that replicated the extreme environmental factors that are ever present in an outer space situation.

The choice of our 'hostile environment' was the triangle of land formed within the fast interchange system between the M1 and M18 in South Yorkshire. This is a crucial intersection linking all routes south to London, all routes into Yorkshire, all routes west to Hull, and all routes to the North East and Scotland. Various suitable factors for replicating an outer space environment were available including : a constant noise from the 24 hour volume of traffic, an alien atmosphere due to the pollution levels, and permanent light effects throughout the hours of darkness. The thrust of the experiment would be to see if the test group could internalise and block out these alien conditions, and maintain an 'office mentality'. (....)

The project proved a near complete success - with only one test subject proving to have an adverse reaction. At first we thought it might be a mutant strain of hayfever caused by gusts of g.m. pollen from a neighbouring g.m. crop site, but a little bit of research at the local studies library revealed that in the 1930's 56 cows had been destroyed after contracting foot and mouth disease, and their corpse had been buried close to the test site. It was concluded that our unfortunate specimin had caught a form of foot and mouth - and so the problem of them providing a statistical 'outlier' to the main results from the project could be eliminated.

And so it is with complete confidence that we can predict the massimplementation of moon-based and orbiting

offices within the next decade. An implementation procedure that will simultaneously free our cities of manifesting office developments, and free our cultural control systems from potential overload.

UPCOMING SPACE 1999 EVENTS:

Sunday June 20th:

2pm: Three-sided Football, AAA Krazy Golf & Picnic
Venue: Assemble Speakers' Corner. Hyde Park tube.

8pm: AAA Pub Night: Space Quiz and debate of the Millennium: Star Trek v. Babylon 5.

£1. Sponsored by The Idler

Venue: Penny Black, Mount Pleasant WC1. Farringdon tube.

Monday 21st:

Noon: Press Conference & AAA Bologna Psychic Attack against NASA

Venue: Blackwall Steps. Yabsley Street E14. Blackwall DLR.

6pm: Foundation for Art in Zero Gravity Environments launch event:

Julie Bacon: AQUARANTINE INTERCOURSE incontinently itinerant, interdisciplinary living in n degrees;

Andy Smith: (Project One): THERE'S NEVER ENOUGH SPACE a meditation on the possibilities and practice of taking performance into new landscapes;

Stuart B (Nomad AAA): POLAROID HAIKU crossing innumerable borders with simultaneous actions.

Free entrance

Venue : Central St. Martin's College, 107 Charing Cross Road, WC2.

8pm: Solstice outdoor training for autonomous astronauts, featuring star navigation, low level gravity practice, dreamtime workshop, and astral projection exercise.

Venue: Hampstead Heath, Assemble Hampstead Heath BR, Southend Road, NW3

"The Five Year Plan:

Propaganda and printed matter from the Association of Autonomous Astronauts."

Open daily from 1pm - 6pm throughout the festival.
Event updates, information and your input.

Info Centre, 123A Mare Street, E8.

Bethnal Green Tube, buses 26, 48, 55, 106, 253.

After a 20 minute pause, Barry Bryant (Aotearoa AAA) reflected on the necessity for radical emigration from Earth which, according to him, is necessary to save the planet from mankind's thirst for resources. Then he explained his group's researches on building spaceships with Readily Available Materials (RAM technology). Riccardo Balli (AAA Bologna) sketched the lines of their literary project, which includes a 333 day extension to the AAA five year plan. Dorothy Matrix outlined a psychogeographical experiment concerning the resistance of office mentalities in hostile environments, which took place at the juncture of three highways in the north of England. The last intervention was Inner City AAA's, which consisted of a review of space colonisation projects, and a parallel critique of the technological utopianism operating in them. Inner City AAA stressed the necessity of looking at the social implications of these rationalistic utopias, in order to become aware of their totalitarian implications.

To briefly conclude, we can say that we really enjoyed the conference, and the only thing we regret about it is that no woman was scheduled amongst the speakers.



Extraterrestrial Cinema

At 8.00 pm I arrived with a delegation of other Autonomous Astronauts at "Strike", in Fashion Street near Brick Lane, the venue that was hosting "ETC" (Extraterrestrial Cinema). "Strike" is a spacious loft situated at the top of a building used as a studio by

artists. The event was organized by two groups: "My eyes, My eyes", a collective that organises independent and underground video events, and of course the A.A.A.. As I arrived, a few people were there, so I turned my videocamera on and started to film the place. "Strike" consists of three rooms: a large entrance, a main room dedicated to projections and a small bar room. In the bar room an AAA stall was situated with "Space 1999" programs and updates and other AAA propaganda: newsletter, books, stickers, annual reports and so on.

Dj "somebody" kicks off playing some hard rocky stuff.....o.k., here we are, the evening is slowly starting! As I come back from the bar room to the projection room, I noticed that suddenly a lot of people had turned up. The lights have been switched off and more or less everything seems ready. Exactly opposite to the big monitor for video projections a slide projector is showing Laura Liverani's "Mondo Astronauta: portraits of the AAA" a sort of collection of photographs of Autonomous Astronauts taken at the Second Intergalactic Conference in Bologna. Dj "somebody" has now started to play some more drum'n'bassy tunes...

And then the videos! Since AAA help is requested at the door and the bar I go to the AAA stall and so couldn't really appreciate the videos that much. The only one I can really speak about is the first one, "Victims of Geography", a movie produced in collaboration with Channel Four. It features interviews with AAA representatives (another media invasion!!) and a lot of stuff about Sarajevo and the former Yugoslavia. I stayed the majority of the night sat down, completely knackered, behind the stall selling AAA shirts and Annual Reports. I nearly managed to sell a copy of the Italian AAA book "Anche tu astronauta" to a spanish guy...

At half past one, I leave "Strike" with two other Autonomous Astronauts and, hungry like a wolf, I go for a take away curry in one of the Brick Lane curry houses.

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